

What Happens When I'm Not Enough? by Rosy_el

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Summary:

“I’m going to do this fast, for the both of us.” His gaze fell to the ground. He swallowed and then forced his eyes back to her face. His heart broke in that moment, just like he knew it would.

El realized that tears were crowding on Mike’s eyelashes and she immediately felt them forming on her own. “No.”

Mike was already crying.

(Eleven and Mike are nineteen and things aren't so easy anymore.)

What Happens When I'm Not Enough?

Author's Note:

This is far more heavy than anything I've written before now. I hope you like it... ahh...

April, 1990

She knew something was wrong the moment he ducked off the bus. He looked too tired. Mike always smiled at her and ran to her and swept her up in his arms like it had been a million years—and to her, it had been. But now... now he kept his eyes on the wet pavement and avoided her gaze.

He'd told her not to meet him at the station. "It's too stormy; I'll just come to your house," he'd said when he'd called her on a public telephone at the halfway point between Cambridge, Massachusetts and Hawkins. But of course there was no shaking El from her conviction to be there, waiting for him.

Mike had started his freshman year at MIT in August, while El was taking a year to work before either attending Pennsylvania State University or University of Massachusetts; both had great programs in communication disorders (what El planned on going into) and she had scholarships to both, now it was a matter of deciding. She was clearly leaning toward Massachusetts.

El shoved the sinking feeling in her gut aside as best she could, drawing him tightly to her. He smiled into the hood of her red rain jacket, but it was a stale, sad smile. A goodbye smile.

He was trying to be as determined as he possibly could be; this was for her. He pulled away too soon and nodded to El's car. "Let's go to the park, huh?" He said softly, evading her big brown gaze with all his power. He knew that would be the thing to shatter him all over again. Mike started toward her car, suitcase in tow. She watched him for only a moment, a blackness crawling into her gut, and then followed.

She cranked up the car, her deep green Chevy Sprint coming to life, spitting hot air onto their shivering bodies. *The park?* El wondered in her head, purposefully blocking the words from reaching Mike's. The only sound that filled the car on the short drive over was the soft buzzing of the radio and the light patter of cold rain slapping the window shield. Mike kept his hands on his knees and watched out the window, offering minimal responses to El's usual questions.

"How has that one Microbial Systems professor been? Any easier on you?"

"You got extra credit in Synthetic Biology for getting published in the school's scientific weekly journal, right?"

"How's the meal plan? Bet you can't wait for your mom's cooking."

She pulled up to the empty park and killed the engine. Harrison Park; right between her house and Mike's. He'd taught her to swing here.

One Week Previously:

Mike sat in his dorm room, stomach stewing and staring blankly at the letter El had sent. It was like almost all the others—they were all stacked on his desk in a neat pile. He liked to go through them when he was frustrated at some homework or felt lonely or couldn't stand to look at one more flashcard. The familiar "*Mike*,"—written in her careful cursive handwriting—allowed him to breathe again. She would talk to him in his head more often but it made her nose bleed pretty bad from that distance and she was bad at remembering to pack her own tissues—that had always been Mike's job.

But something in Mike was twitching; a foreign fear was licking hotly at his insides.

"I can't wait to be closer to you. I'm 98.627% sure I'll be at Massachusetts U. this time year next year. We'll see each other all time!" He had a thing about rounding to the thousandth and El knew it, taking the opportunity to tease him.

He cried all night.

El let her hands fall into her lap, letting the radio die and the sound of rain become the sole source of background noise. Mike looked like he was in a daze, eyes still stuck on something outside of the window.

“Mike?” El murmured, no longer able to ignore the ugly feeling pulling at her lungs.

He turned to look at her, dark eyes empty.

“I’m going to do this fast, for the both of us.” His gaze fell to the ground. He swallowed and then forced his eyes back to her face. His heart broke in that moment, just like he knew it would.

El realized that tears were crowding on Mike’s eyelashes and she immediately felt them forming on her own. Her brain and her body were working out of conjunction and she felt like she was spinning and deadly numb all at once.

“No.” It came out choked and then she was pulling at the car door and slamming it shut behind her and leaning against the slick exterior of the car, salty wetness spilling down her face, mixing with the light rain.

Mike was already crying. He dragged his hands down his eyelids—a vain effort to get rid of the tears. He released a ragged breath and opened his own car door. She was facing the other direction, shoulders trembling up and down. He put his hands on the roof of the car and sighed but it came out torn.

“El.”

“Don’t.”

“I have to.”

She whirled around, eyes bloodshot and nose running. She ripped her jacket sleeve across her nose angrily. “Like hell you have to, Mike.”

“El, I can’t do this to you anymore.” His wet eyes looked steely and

distant. It was self-preservation—even though his heart was already splintered in his chest.

“You can’t do *what* anymore, Mike? What the hell are you talking about?!” She yelled hotly at him, voice strong but broken all at the same time. That had always been El, from the moment she showed up in the rain on Mirkwood: strong but broken.

“I can’t let you keep—keep,” he searched for the word, all too aware of her fierce eyes on him, “*limiting* yourself to me, El! You don’t even know a world outside of this damn town and you’re going to go to college and figure out that you’ve wasted seven years on *me*!” He drew his jaw shut tight, gritting his teeth at the pain screaming in his head and chest and everywhere in his body. “I can’t keep pretending like I’m enough for you.”

She searched his face urgently, hands flat at her sides. Her hood had fallen off. She didn’t notice.

“You don’t want someone like me, El. You don’t even know what’s out there,” he ended, eyes cemented to the car roof.

“Don’t you dare, Mike.” She didn’t bother wiping the falling tears away. What was the use if there would just be more to follow them? “I’m so damn sick of you thinking you aren’t enough for me!” He wouldn’t look up and she threw her arms out in frustration. “I’m not twelve anymore, Mike! I don’t need anyone to teach me what things mean. I’ve figured most of it out. I know what I want and I want you. Don’t you dare tell me otherwise. I love you so much *it hurts*, Mike. Why can’t *that* be enough?”

Mike’s eyes shot up but he shook his head hurriedly. He had already made up his mind.

El huffed, throat shaky, and turned away from him again, back pressed against the car.

The air was quiet for another moment.

“You could do better than me El. You will.”

Something inside her cracked. El whipped around and stormed over

to him, hands fisted and eyes spilling. “How could I possibly do better than you? Michael Wheeler, you are the most selfless, brave, kind, gentle, loyal, *loving* person I’ve ever known in my entire life. Your brain can go to hell if that’s the only thing you think you’ve got going for you. It’s your *heart*, Mike.” She placed a small hand over his thumping chest. “And that damn freckled face of yours.”

He fought to look indifferent at her words even though all he wanted to do was crumple in her arms.

“Don’t do that!” El sobbed at his stillness.

“Don’t do *what*?” He asked, like it was a challenge. His wet blackish hair hung down on his forehead, dripping water down his nose and off his lips. The rain had grown more ferocious, pelting at their paled skin and soaking their clothes through.

“Don’t act like this means nothing to you—like you don’t want me.” It came out sharp and quiet. “I don’t deserve that.”

Mike let himself find her face and then her eyes. They were red and worn and he had never felt so guilty in his entire existence; hurting her. Hurting the girl he loved with every cell—every atom—in his body.

“Is that what this looks like to you?” He asked. “Like I don’t want you?” He let out a short, wet laugh. El stayed completely still, heavy breathes pulling at her chest as her eyes stayed locked on his.

“I’ve never wanted anything so badly in my life.” His voice didn’t shake.

They stared at one another, icy rain dripping down their chilled heads and necks.

“I’m yours for the taking.” Her voice didn’t shake either.

And then he was broken and then they were kissing, his lips hot on hers despite the frigid rain and her hands balled furiously in his shirt and wrapping around his neck and up into his curling hair and they were crying and kissing and kissing and kissing like there was nothing else they could possibly do.

“I love you, I love you, I’m so sorry,” he sobbed into her cheek, the concrete façade he had so carefully constructed crumbling and collapsing under her touch. She kissed him with all the power she possessed. It was only when she pulled away and burrowed her face into his neck that they realized they weren’t even on the ground.

Mike gasped hoarsely and held her tighter; they were ten feet up. She fingered the blood on her nostril timidly. He pulled a soggy tissue out of his pocket. El laughed and then sobbed. “Don’t ever do that again, Mike,” she cried and punched his chest, dropping their feet safely back to the pavement.

He wiped the blood away for her.

The next morning, they woke up with chest colds and bigger smiles than they had had for a long time.

Author's Note:

Relieved? Erupting from feels? Comment your thoughts and ideas, etc. I love them so, so much. Thank you for all the kindness and support. It's so amazing.